

GIRL TROUBLE

Recollections of life with Grandmother when on our way to the USA.

Vytautas F. Beliajus

By the time we reached the German border, and with all the ado due to border inspection, I had forgotten that I left mother in a faint at the Kaunas depot without getting her farewell kiss and blessing. By then I had become acquainted with Mrs. Petrauskis and her four daughters who were migrating to Waukegan, Ill. Grandmother and Mrs. Petrauskis exchanged their life histories while I and the girls, Stasė, Juzė, Mikauzė and Vincė, sang folk songs.

The following day, before approaching Berlin, grandmother's eldest grand-daughter, Ester Aranauskis, entered the train. We considered her appearance miraculous. How did she know where to find us? Grandmother was happy. We were traveling 3rd class. Mrs. Aranauskis, being a capitalist, felt slighted that her grandmother should travel 3rd class. She fussed with the conductors, thinking, "Surely it must be a mistake. The American daughters could not have bought 3rd class passage way." But they had, so she had us transffered to 2nd class, a most unwelcome change, for it separated us from the Petrauskis family.

We only made two stops before reaching Bremen — Berlin and Hanover. But as far as I was concerned, we just as soon need not have stopped even there. Grandmother kept a close vigil over me. In Berlin the train was elevated, so we got a chance to feast on Berlin's grandeur. But in Hanover it seemed we were underground all the time.

In Bremen we were assigned to an immigrant hotel where we stayed for a whole week. There were series of physical examinations. When not being examined, I was on a spree. Grandmother was busy exchanging novel news with the new acquaintances. Assuring her that I will not wander away far, or be lost I was "released." Once outside, I investigated the city's width and length, and soon knew the city as I knew my village of Pakumprys. I used the trams and my feet to cover distances. I was fascinated by the "Rathouse" (city hall) and Bremen's quaint architecture. I visited the fair grounds and had a few rides, and even treated a little girl to a ride.

When grandmother would not let me leave the hotel grounds, I made friends with my own age immigrants, especially with a girl who was on her way to Balti Murai (Baltimore). I marveled that they had cities in the United States which bore Lithuanian names (Balti Mūrai — White buildings).

The highlight of the week for grandmother was the visit of her great-grandson Salia Aranauskis, a lad in his early twenty's who studied engineering at one of the German Universities. Grandmother was overjoyed and proudly introduced him to all who were around. After all, how many women live to own a great-grandson in the twenties? And if God wills, Salia being of marriageable age, there would be a great great grandson (and there was during her lifetime). Now, had he been a girl she most certainly would have long been married and with child, reasoned grandmother.

As we were about to leave for Hamburg, where we were to take the boat, an immigration official came and asked that either grandmother or I should go to identify our baggage, that it may be shipped along with us. Since I spoke German, I went. Grandmother became frightened, lest we get separated. But she was assured by the official,

that in case I would miss the train I will arrive on a later one directly to her place. The indentification lasted a second, pointing out two bags. But by the time I returned grandmother was gone.

The next train left a few hours later. I acted stoic but was uneasy nevertheless. When I arrived un Hamburg I was placed in a tourist hotel, where neither grandmother or the Petrauskis' were located. The hotel was overcrowded with tourists returning to the United States. The only immigrants were a rich Austrian woman with her son and their Czech maid, a girl of eighteen. Being concerned about grandmother and knowing how she would worry, I could barely eat my meal.

The Austrian lady undertook to look after me, but I announced that I'll go to search for grandmother. She advised me against my going, for Hamburg is a huge city of over a million in population and I'd lose myself for sure, and worse consequences might result. But emphatically I announced: "Ich muss ja doch mein Hohmama fuenden!" (But I definitely must find grandmother).

I walked and walked without even paying attention to where I was going. I reached the port and watched the boats and ships. I walked on boulevards and peered into the fancy hotels afronted with doormen, but grandmother was nowhere. I covered many miles. How I ever came back to the hotel which I even didn't know by name, is beyond me.

It was getting dark when I returned, and the Austrians were genuinely concerned; they were greatly relieved on seeing me. Soon a clerk came to inform me that due to over crowdedess, and because my arrival was unscheduled, no room was reserved for me. The only thing the management could figure out was that I share the room assigned to the Czech girl.

That was a sudden blow for me. Being troubled about grandmother, this new announcement released a flood of tears and I protested; "Nein! Ich wuerde mit keine Maedchen schlaffen!" (No! I'll sleep with no girls!). The Austrians considered the situation amusing and laughed heartily. I was determined. The girl, who did not understand German, was in the dark until her mistress explained to her in Czech and she blushed. Of course, I barely entered my teens but I was "old enough" to know that sleeping with a girl was a sin and not respectable. The Austrian lady, softening up, pleaded for my cause with the management; perhaps they'd permit me to sleep in the hallway; but that was definitely "Verboten". In spite of my tears I was pushed into the room with the girl. I suffered a still greater shock when I discovered that the room had only one bed! To be sure, prepared most elegantly. Out of sheer shame I went to the window and cried as if my heart would break. I must have been standing for hours without turning around even to see what the girl might be doing. I cried until my tears exhausted and my feet became too tired to stand up, so backed up to the bed until I hit it. I sat down for a while moaning. Finally, I became too tired even for that and I laid down on the very edge of the bed with my feet on the floor, and fell asleep.

When I woke up the next morning, the girl was standing near the dresser. I had no idea if and/or where she slept. I jumped up and ran out of the room. The Austrians were in the dining room and they wasted no time to tease me. But this time I only blushed.

About 9:00 A. M. we left for the boat. As I was milling on the pier, I heard Juzė's voice calling me. Soon she was near me all excited and took me to the wagon where her family and grandmother were. Grandmother

was all over joyed, embracing me she wept muttering happily in a mixed language; "Mein Kind! Mein Kind! Aciū Dievui! Aš vos proto nepraradau!" (My child, my child! I nearly lost my sanity!). While Mrs. Petrauskis spoke to grandmother victorious; "Jug sakiau, kad atsi-ras prie laivo!" (And I told you that he will be found near the boat). She immediately proceeded telling me; "Verkė per visa nakti." (She wept throughout the night) and even refused to leave for the boat. It took all our persuation to make her come this far. But thanks be to God everything is now in order."

"I wept all night, too." I said sheepishly, but I did not imply why my tears.

When we entered the ferry boat that was to take us to, the trans-Atlantic ship, grandmother held on tightly to my hand, to be sure I'd get lost no more.

IN MEMORIAM

To My Dearly Beloved Parents Who were brutally slain on September 28, 1943

In memory of my brothers AREJAS and NATAS who died in exile in Russia under unknown conditions and at unknown dates.

IN MEMORIAM

To My Beloved And Sainted Grandmother Who ascended to heavenly rest on September 22, 1936

"Lord, I am not worthy that You should enter under my roof, Say but the word and my soul shall be healed."

Vytautas Finadar Beliajus

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WESTERN DANCING IN JAPAN

(This letter was sent to E. R. Johnson, who while in Japan, introduced American folk dances. Now, the Japanese want more of it. VILTIS undertook to supply Mr. Wasa with additional material. VFB)

"...My work in popularizing the folk dance is going on very well. I will give you a brief report of the main news. The radio broadcast which we had been planning since 1947 began in September last year by the kind effort of Mr. Albert Crews and Mr. P. Okada. Eight members of the Osaka folk dance club are performing in the JOBK studios on my instruction. By broadcasting to the schools, the square dance has become quite a popular enjoyment. This broadcast will be concluded March 18, but I am hoping to broadcast to the general public Subsequently.

The National Recreation Meeting was held in Tokyo in October last year and on the occasion, a square dance concour (contest) was given. Champions from all over the country participated and I was very happy to see the popularity in attending it as one of the judges.

The Annual Rhythmical Athletic meeting in Nishinomiya, sponsored by the Ashahi Press will be opened for the 4th time on May 14th. The Industrial team will perform the square dance and the young men's team will display the Virginia Reel and a Circle Dance.

Kasugaoka High School was winner of the folk dance concour last year. Both the teachers and the students are eager about the promoting of the folk dance and they have now organized the Kasugoaka Folk Dance Club.

The O. F. D. C. has now become quite a big organization of 600 members and as you can see in the above report, the enjoyable dance which you started in Osaka has become very popular throughout Japan. I would appreciate it very much if you would kindly send some material on the new folk dance."

R. Wasa. Takatsuki, Japan.



U. S. PAL A STINKER

Leonardis Barbans, a 20 year old Latvian D. P. of Ionia, Mich., had some "cold water" thrown at his enthusiasm for the U. S. Having loved cats in his native Latvia, he adopted a stray one on the farm he is employed. One day the cat brought a visitor — a real pretty cat. Leonardis was over joyed and stooped down to pet the new cat. Something happened and Len jumped back in anguish, feeling blinded and as if his scalp was searing. He groped his way to the farm and painfully announced: "I've been bombed."

The Latvian women screamed and gasped. Hastily they summoned George Ferguson, the farm manager, that he explain the vicious attack on an innocent and well meaning person.

Ferguson had no trouble solving the mystery, but he did have difficulty explaining it to Leonardis and the other immigrants for two reasons: 1) Ferguson had to yell his explanation from a considerable distance. 2) There are no skunks in Latvia.

"Mama," said little Johnny, "don't men ever go to heaven?"

"Why, of course dear, What makes you ask?" "Because I never see any pictures of angels with whiskers."

"Well." said the mother thoughtfully, "some men do get to heaven, but they get there by a close shave."